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SIPDIS

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Classified by DCM James F. Entwistle for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

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- ATTACKS ON BUDDHIST TEMPLES
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UPFA WINS PROVINCIAL ELECTION

¶ 11. (SBU) FYI. As flagged in Colombo 669, Provincial Council elections in the "Wayamba" province of north-central Sri Lanka took place on April 26. In an impressive showing, the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) captured 31 seats on the Council, with 19 going to the United National Party (UNP) and two to the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). All of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna candidates who ran under the UPFA banner won seats on the council. Voter turnout was estimated at roughly 55 percent, which is quite low compared to the roughly 75 percent turnout that was observed in the April 2 Parliamentary election. The election was largely peaceful, with only a handful of minor disturbances. Elections for the other provincial councils are due later in the year. The positive result in Wayamba may buck up the UPFA, which is still stunned by its loss in the race for parliamentary speaker late last week (see below). (POL)

ATTACKS ON BUDDHIST TEMPLES

¶ 12. (SBU) FYI. Two MPs in the JHU party and their temples came under attack over the weekend (April 24). Both monks were personally threatened and property was damaged at one of the temples. The two JHU monks who were victimized were the ones who supported the UPFA candidate for speaker during the parliamentary session on April 22. (In that divisive session, MPs from the President's UPFA verbally attacked the JHU for not supporting its candidate for speaker.) The perpetrators of the temple attacks appear to have been from the UPFA. At this point, we would say that the JHU's relationship with the UPFA is going from bad to worse, which is not good for the UPFA's efforts to get control of Parliament. (Note: The JHU is reportedly planning to punish the two JHU monks who voted for the UPFA candidate for speaker.) (POL)

TIGER STATEMENT RE NORWEGIAN FACILITATION

¶ 13. (SBU) FYI. In an article carried by pro-Tiger website "TamilNet" on April 25, LTTE "media coordinator" Daya Master stated that the Tigers would announce their stand on resuming peace talks when the Norwegian government informs the Tigers on the GSL position re returning to the negotiating table. Daya Master also stated that any future peace talks would be based on the Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal that the Tigers submitted last year. Daya Master added, "If this (the ISGA) is accepted as a basis for talks, then the chances of the LTTE participating in the talks and the peace process being taken forward without disruptions are good." We note that Daya Master seemed to be carefully noting that the ISGA could be "a basis" and not the only basis for talks, which is good. (By the way, the UNP welcomed the re-enlistment of the Norwegians in peace process facilitation, while wondering why the UPFA had criticized the former UNP government on the matter so heatedly during the campaign. (POL)

¶ 14. (C) Also, on April 26 Mission received the text of a public statement by the GSL regarding Norwegian facilitation of the peace talks. The statement says that President Kumaratunga had discussions with both Ambassador Brattskar in Colombo and Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Bondevik via telephone on the issue of facilitation. The text of the statement is being sent

to the desk and Embassy Oslo via email. (POL)

Ambassador Calls on CBK

15. (SBU) Jeff is calling on the President as we go to press. We'll report the conversation Tuesday. (DCM)

LUNSTEAD